

**NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

**Building A Global Community**

**A Thesis Submitted to the**

**University Honors Program**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the**

**Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree**

**With Upper Division Honors**

**Department Of**

**Foreign Language and Literature**

**By**

**Matthew Carlin**

**DeKalb, Illinois**

**May, 2011**

**University Honors Program**

**Capstone Approval Page**

Capstone Title: (print or type):

Building a global community  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Student Name (print or type):

Matthew Carlin

Faculty Supervisor (print or type):

Christopher Nissen

Faculty Approval Signature:

Christopher K Nissen

Department of (print or type):

Foreign Language & Literature

Date of Approval (print or type):

5-4-11

Matthew Carlin

Building a Global Community

Christopher Nissen

Foreign Language and Literature

2011

Works Cited Attached

26 Pages

Not Published

Hard Copy Available

Abstract:

The world is flatter now than ever before and this creates great opportunities but also great problems. One of the biggest problems to arise is a lack of understanding between cultures. This paper looks at one process of learning culture through study abroad and how to enhance that experience with volunteer work. Secondary research was used to learn the history, benefits, and drawbacks of both study abroad and volunteer work. Two surveys were designed to gather primary sources to confirm the secondary research. Through this research, I found that study abroad is trending towards a more meaningful cultural experience. There are additional benefits of volunteer work, such as the mental health benefits and the community health benefits, that could be added to the study abroad experience. This paper concludes with a suggested method of adding volunteer work to study abroad in order to create a deeper connection across cultures, and to build a better global community.

Matthew Carlin

Professor Christopher Nissen

Honors Capstone

8 April 2011

## Building a Global Community

### Introduction

During my senior year, I took a class called Social Entrepreneurship, in which I heard many speakers who were operating in the non-profit sector. One of the most impressive was Jessica Jackley. She is the founder of Kiva, a peer to peer loan service that benefited microfinance. She was inspired by Dr. Muhammad Yunus when he gave a talk at the school where she worked. After hearing him, she went to Africa to see the effects of microfinance. She spent years there, examining the workings of the economies and making friends. When she returned to the States she launched Kiva, and funded her eight initial entrepreneurs in one day. Since its founding in 2005, Kiva has lent almost \$205 million to entrepreneurs around the world. (Kiva.org) Kiva was built around the idea that the lenders and entrepreneurs should share stories and create a link across the globe; the same kind she had with her initial eight entrepreneurs. Through her talk, Jessica taught us the importance of building these connections. Not just to help ourselves, but to help build a global community. The same way you build a friendship by having done things together, making stories together, you can build a global network by helping someone grow out of poverty. The class, and this talk in particular, pushed me to think about how I could help. There are always a number of local options, but when I heard of the opportunity to help out and travel the world, I jumped at it.

During that winter break, I worked down in Mexico. I spent my days in a quiet town called Punta De Mita where I was doing marketing work for a non-profit called PEACE Mexico. I did some entry level office work most days but each Thursday the volunteers went over to an abandoned

house and cleaned up the yard. The experience was enlightening. To me this was just a little bit of manual labor, but to the town this was a community bonding experience and I was part of it. That feeling of community can be built between disparate people around the world. The idea that anyone can organize a yard clean-up, a simple effort to beautify, yet it makes so strong a connection that it crosses the language barrier struck true with what Jessica had said. It is all about the stories. The feeling of belonging to a town across the ocean, or over the mountains, somewhere far away, creates a home away from home. We start belonging to cultures other than our own and become more understanding of all cultures across the world. Now, I can have a neighbor down the street, or in another country, and we can feel just as connected.

This paper is the result of that experience. In Mexico, I learned Spanish in the morning and did volunteer work in the afternoon. I met many fantastic people and spent time in a beautiful country. In this paper I will examine exactly what type of trip I took and how it can be applied beyond the organization I worked for. This type of experience could replace current models of study abroad. Instead of just learning a new language and culture, a student could become part of a community; building good will across the globe, one city at a time. The academic world is on the verge of a revolution in foreign studies. Language and culture won't just exist as academic exercises, but will transform lives internationally. Here, we will explore the benefits of adding volunteer work to a study abroad program and how to execute it properly.

I started by doing secondary source research. This included reading a variety of academic articles and books, taking microfinance and social entrepreneurship classes here at NIU, and looking through Internet articles. After determining key concepts to focus on, I wrote two surveys, one to learn more about the benefits of study abroad and the other about volunteering. These were used as corroborating evidence to the first round of research and helped shape the recommendation at the end.

First, we will look at the concept of studying abroad, to see how it has changed over the years,

some different types of study programs, their advantages and disadvantages, and ways to get the most out of the experience. Then we will examine volunteer work. We will explore the different roles it plays in society, as well as its pros and cons. Finally, we will look at where the two activities already overlap, and ways to blend volunteer work with the study abroad experience.

## Study Abroad

Study abroad is defined as a student taking courses outside of their country. For American students, this means, as the University of Wisconsin nicely states, "all educational programs outside the geographical boundaries of the United States."([wisconsin.edu](http://wisconsin.edu)) Of course, this is not how we tell students about study abroad. To them it is sold as Aaron Gross' time in Tel-Aviv (Whelan, N05) or Ben Bernard, who, after spending a semester at Oxford, "plans on going overseas again soon" ("Students Who Want to Get as Far From Home as Possible"). Stories of participant experiences are what sell these programs. In order to understand the current state of study abroad, we will take a look at where it started.

The first American study abroad program was the brain child of a Prof. Raymond W. Kirkbride. Having fought in World War I, he knew how misunderstandings between cultures or nations could have disastrous consequences. In 1921, he proposed to the President of the University of Delaware that students be sent overseas for their junior year of school. In 1923, his proposal was accepted and the first group of students sailed to France. Students from a wide range of respected universities, including Harvard and Princeton, took part in this program. It lasted 25 years, before it was halted in 1948 due to the poor state of Europe after the war (Kochanek).

These early versions of study abroad were "enclave models"(LaFranchi, 23). This meant, basically, that an American University was built on foreign soil; Harvard would have a building in England, Princeton would have a lecture hall in Paris. Students would be in a foreign country, but they would still be taking American classes. Around the time of World War II, America was going through an isolationist period."Many Americans believed that the sacrifices they had made in the Great War had been a waste of money and men. They were opposed to anything that might drag America into another European war."([schoolhistory.org.uk](http://schoolhistory.org.uk)) Protected from the war by ocean on both sides, America, including its schools, was reluctant to set foot on foreign soil. So when they did manage to cross, they

brought as much Americana with them as possible.

As Americans opened up, becoming more comfortable in the international community, so did the study abroad programs. In 1984, Mark Mancall, director of study abroad for Stanford, said "we are moving away from the old enclave model." Students had been embracing cultural norms and interacting with the locals in either English or the native language. This interaction led to a mixing of cultural norms. One unfortunate pairing was Europe's lax alcohol laws and the American students' binge drinking. Europe has a generally relaxed relation with alcohol. Save for Iceland, the legal consumption age in Europe is typically 18, 20 in Iceland(potsdam.edu). A majority of study abroad students will have legal access to alcohol at least 3 years earlier than they would in the U.S.

Americans weren't the only students abroad. China ran into problems starting in the late 1970's. Students were expected to learn from the Western teachers and bring that knowledge back into China to help boost its economy and political standing. However, students found ways to stay abroad and many never returned. "Some 38,000 Chinese have been sent to western universities for advanced study. According to the government's figures, only 15,000 have returned by last August"("After they've seen Paree", 50). This trend siphoned some of China's brightest minds out of the country, stunting their growth during that time.

This current model, while creating certain problems, was a major step toward creating a sense of global unity. Students were finally getting out of their native lifestyles and experiencing another culture. They connected so much they could even be changed by the experience.

In the current model students abroad have many different options. The first major choice is duration. These programs can last an entire academic year, or just a few weeks while students are on summer or winter break. The longer a student spends abroad, the more exposure to the new language and culture they will get, increasing fluency and comfort with their new surroundings. "The first six weeks are taken up very much by culture shock for most students, so a longer term, preferably a year, is



what we would advocate if a student can do it"(Arenson, 17). However, the longer stays can be prohibitively expensive and are not always the best choice for students. The shorter programs have opened up study abroad to more students, but at the expense of depth. "The increase in short programs reflects the growing belief that students should learn more about the world beyond the United States. But it also reflects a recognition by many colleges that some students will not go abroad unless the experiences come in smaller packages"(Arenson, 17). Students have less time to interact with the foreign culture and can't develop as strong a connection with it.

Of course, time isn't the only factor in these programs. Who a student travels with is also important. Students can enroll through a private school, take a university class, join a local group, or go alone and find a tutor(Learning the Language, E12). The different types of programs have different benefits. Enrolling through a private school adds that institution's prestige to the program. The caliber of student accepted into these programs is typically higher than that of students going through their community college. A stronger focus on academics also exists in these programs. Going alone or through a local group will have the least focus on academics and the most focus on learning the culture or just the experience of being in a new place.

Student age is also a variable in study abroad. Typically, when study abroad is mentioned it conjures up the image of a 20 year old sipping coffee in Spain or some other European city. This is what most students are told; they are in the prime of their lives and should explore the world to broaden their horizons. But your typical undergrad isn't the only one who can benefit from an international experience. Successful seniors also find benefit in time overseas. "A number of Japanese retired businessmen are getting a new start in life with study abroad"("Overseas study rejuvenates retirees"). These non-traditional students have spent their entire lives in the business world and start feeling burnt out. Study abroad can free them from their rut. Hiroshi Eguchi, a retiree who went abroad, said, "The experience made me feel ambitious. Now I want to face new challenges in different fields of

work"("Overseas study rejuvenates retirees"). Not only do these retirees build new skills, but they feel a renewed sense of confidence in themselves that was eroded by decades spent in the strenuous Japanese work environment.

The different types of study abroad offer students of all ages multiple benefits. The first, and most obvious, is the cultural experience. Students going abroad have the opportunity to develop a personal understanding of a new culture. This extends beyond textbook learning; they get to see the culture as it actually exists. Examining a new culture at this level provides students profound insights into the workings of the world. "Trips sensitize students to different cultures in a way reading books does not"(Arenson, 17). Students break stereotypes, and start to appreciate the minutiae of a culture that they previously had only a general picture of. Upon closer examination of a new culture, students learn from experience how similar cultures truly are and the logic behind the differences.

Students also develop new skills. It is rare for a person to ever encounter a language barrier in their country of origin. American students speak English, Chinese students speak Chinese, and French students speak French. Once we send the French student to China, the Chinese student to America, and the American student to France, they all are learning the same skill, communication without verbal language. Eventually, during the longer programs in particular, the student will learn the language and gain the ability to communicate verbally. Along with the inherent language challenge, students develop skills as they would in class. In the case of the Japanese businessmen, they already had the business skill set, but wanted to learn something new. "Hiroshi Eguchi...flew to the U.S. in 1990 to study electronic engineering"("Overseas study rejuvenates retirees"). Spending time abroad pushed this man to try something completely new and has the same effect on younger students as well.

One of the most interesting things to develop, besides skill sets, is a general self-confidence. "Many people come home with a regained confidence in themselves"("Overseas study rejuvenates retirees"). The retired businessmen, who have been successful almost all their lives are gaining this

confidence. The younger students also can benefit from this. Not only do they develop confidence but they learn how to be independent and more mature.

Study abroad students also get to meet people they wouldn't have otherwise. As I mentioned earlier, when Jessica went to Africa she met eight entrepreneurs. To this day she keeps in touch with them and is as up-to-date on their lives as they are with her.

The experience itself is a resumé builder for many students. Each year, more people enter the workforce and jobs become harder to get. Students are pushed to find ways to differentiate themselves from the thousands of other graduates and study abroad does just that. "The time overseas gives an indication that the students have the spirit to get up and go"(Harris, 16). Studying abroad is intimidating and only driven students pursue it to completion. Employers are looking for motivated, culturally sensitive job candidates in this increasingly global economy. Study abroad demonstrates both of these characteristics at once.

A final benefit for students is the development of new interests. Hiroshi Eguchi "began working as a part-time translator, and is now studying to become a certified accountant"("Overseas study rejuvenates retirees"). This man, after retiring and studying abroad, decided he wanted to try new things. Previously, he was a broadcasting engineer. The jump from engineer to translator is large, and it is highly unlikely Eguchi would have made it had it not been for his time abroad sparking a new interest in him.

For all its benefits, study abroad does have some negatives. Study abroad is expensive. Goucher, the first university to require study abroad, has three week programs that range in price between \$2,000 and \$3,000(Chmela, 9). For students already paying tuition, room and board, buying books, and paying student fees, the cost of study abroad may stop them in their tracks. Not everyone can spare \$1,000 a week for a quick trip overseas.

Even if you have enough money, study abroad can be intimidating. From flying phobias to the

culture shock, study abroad is no place for the timid. With our world being so volatile, anything can happen during a semester abroad. "Princeton student Callie Lefevre landed in Beirut last summer itching to study Arabic and prepared for a 'totally wonderful experience.' What she got instead was the second Lebanon war, with Israeli fighter planes dropping bombs near her campus"(Popescu, 14). The world is an unstable place and the most exotic destinations for study abroad are also some of the most dangerous. Students need to understand that when they travel to volatile countries, they are potentially putting themselves in harm's way.

Some majors, particularly engineering and other rigidly designed programs, prevent their students from going abroad. Certain majors have so many requirements that students are spread thin just graduating on time. These students simply can't take a semester off, especially during their junior year when most students go overseas(amherst.edu). In my case, I transferred in with all of my general education credits because of my associate degree. Any study abroad semester I would have done couldn't add meaningfully to my credits. I would have simply been tacking on another term to my college career.

Students may even lose the opportunity for internships. While spending time abroad, students miss out on interviews for summer internships. "The competition is such that a lot of the internships are gone before [students] get back... They're definitely at a disadvantage"(McGinn, 10). When students go away, they are certainly getting valuable experiences, but it doesn't compare with a chance to work in their chosen field unless they want to be a translator or foreign language instructor. All students can benefit immensely from working for a company in the form of an internship. Study abroad students, however, are in other countries when their peers are interviewing for these internships. Companies don't have the time to wait for overseas students to get back; they need to guarantee that they have qualified candidates months before the internships start. The result is students abroad miss wonderful internship opportunities because they have the ambition to learn in another country. The very qualities

that companies are looking for in interns prevent students from getting these positions.

Knowing the various benefits and disadvantages of study abroad allows students to choose a program that best suits them. They can live with a family or in dorms, they can choose to only take classes or to participate in 'culturally intense experiences,' and they can choose duration.

A student who has a very strict major or graduation date would want a shorter program. Because I want to graduate within 4 years of my high school graduation, I needed to go abroad during a break. This way, my time abroad wouldn't prevent me from taking classes towards my major. Some students are less eager to enter the work world and can spend a semester or a year abroad and not feel the same time crunch that I did. Depending on how much language a student wants to learn, they can choose their living arrangement. Living in dorms with other English speakers is much more comfortable than living with a host family, but language development is less likely. In Mexico I lived with other English speakers so my opportunity to learn Spanish was hindered. I spoke Spanish with everyone I could outside of the house, but at home we all spoke English. Had I lived with a local family, one that only knew Spanish, I would have been forced to learn the language to a much greater degree. Finally, the intensity of cultural experiences can also be chosen. Students can stick with classes, spending relatively little time absorbing the foreign culture, or they can immerse themselves in their surroundings. In Mexico, I took the bus everywhere, which feels much less safe than the American public transportation system. Eating at the smaller, local, restaurants instead of finding the closest McDonald's was another choice I made. Adopting their culture did have a downside though; I almost missed my flight because people in Mexico are habitually 10 to 15 minutes late.

Overall, I had a great experience and that is the best way to advertise study abroad. "[Study abroad's] greatest selling point is returning students"(Springen and Nagroski, 24). If schools are to get the greatest number of students to take part in this wonderful experience, it needs to be advertised right. In my Italian class, we had a representative from the study abroad office come and talk to our class, but

the best way to advertise is by telling students' stories. People who have gone overseas are so excited when they come back that they want to tell everyone about their experience. These students are the most persuasive and best for recruiting new students into study abroad programs.

## Volunteering

Volunteer work is a global phenomenon that is practiced for many reasons. "The [Australian Bureau of Statistics] definition is someone who 'willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group'(Oppenheimer, 51). Volunteering is not compulsory, is not monetarily reimbursed, and is made available through some larger entity. These larger entities could be local groups, religious organizations or even corporations.

There are many reasons to volunteer. One primary motivator is religion. I grew up in a Jewish household, in a Jewish neighborhood. On turning 13 in the Jewish faith, a child turns adult and one adult responsibility they receive is giving back to the community in the form of volunteer work. Religion expects the new adult, called a Bar or Bat Mitzvah (Bar for male, Bat for female) to help out in some way, clean up a local park, host a food drive, as long as they do something to better someone else's life. This focus on good deeds extends beyond Judaism. One Canadian study found that "religious folk represent 19% of the population, but provide 22% of all charitable dollars and 35% of all volunteer time"(Meed Ward, 50). This study shows that the devout are compelled in disproportionate amounts to help out. The reason may come from a threat which the religious are responding to. In an Irish study, one participant said, "I need to do something or else I won't go to heaven" (MacNeela, 130). Believers are pushed by a higher morality to do what is right, but this isn't the only reason people volunteer.

Some cultures put more emphasis on volunteering than others. "More than one-quarter of Australians -- that is 5.4 million -- volunteer on a regular basis." (Oppenheimer, 51) Australians like to help at about the same rate as Americans. "60.8 million people, or about 26% of Americans age 16 or older, performed unpaid work for a nonprofit organization" (Blum, *Philanthropy.com*). These two societies are taught that helping others is a virtue and that those who participate continue to volunteer into adulthood. However, the numbers of volunteers in Australia or the U.S. can't compare with the spirit described by the Filipino word *bayanihan*. *Bayanihan* is "a Filipino tradition wherein neighbors

would help a relocating family by gathering under their house, and carrying it to its new location. More generally, the word *bayanihan* has come to mean a communal spirit that makes seemingly impossible feats possible through the power of unity and cooperation"(mit.edu). MIT uses the word to describe their volunteer computing concept, taking open-source to the next level. This inspirational concept applies even more to volunteer work; a group coming together to make life better.

Often there is an individual motivation to volunteer as well. A study of Irish volunteers found that some people just enjoy volunteer work. They learn about themselves, while others like feeling challenged, and still more simply want to feel they have contributed in some way(MacNeela, 130-133). All of these are different methods for self-fulfillment and all are satisfied by volunteering. When I was doing yard work in Mexico, I had a similar sense of accomplishment. In just a few hours my group and I had taken this yard, a tangle of dead bushes, used condoms and dirty diapers (the irony was not lost on any of us) and had turned it into a clean lot ready for use. Later in the day, children were painting the house and I knew that they could only do that because of the work we had done.

Another motivator is how volunteer work looks on a resumé. "Volunteering can provide a route to employment for many people, helping unemployed people gain the skills, experience and confidence they need to get back into work or change career paths"(Davis Smith, 25). While people volunteer, they are developing skills that can help them find a paying job. "People are volunteering in media, IT, conservation, child care, even secondhand shops with a view to gaining some retail experience"(Bevan, 67). Volunteer work has spread beyond the typical clean-up crews or food drives. People can volunteer to run web-pages, design logos, or coordinate events. When I was in Mexico, I did some basic marketing work and I learned to be organized in a way that I am not at school. I had to update a media list, something I have never done before, and verify that the contacts were correct; I even added a few more magazines to contact. I'm typically an unorganized person; I keep all of my assignments in piles and I have to look through all of them to find out when a particular project is due. This time in Mexico



gave me a chance to test out being organized and develop a tool set I will use in the future. If I apply to jobs where that particular type of list-making is necessary, I have an example of how I've done it in the past. Even if it doesn't seem like much, I show that I need less training than someone who hasn't done it before.

Finally, there is the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility. This is the work supported by large companies. They can either work on their own or in partnership with organizations like New York Cares. Walgreens, where I work, encourages their employees to do volunteer work and as a company raises money for a number charities every year, including the American Heart Association, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and the American Cancer Society. Employees are also encouraged to participate in the Relay for Life as part of Walgreen's team. If a company isn't directly involved in searching for its volunteer opportunities, it can work through organizations like New York Cares. It "works with partner organizations to identify their most pressing needs, creates projects to bridge the gaps, and recruits, trains and deploys teams of volunteers to make a difference"(newyorkcares.org). Companies such as Goldman Sachs and Credit Suisse work with New York Cares as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.

Volunteer work, no matter how it is motivated, exists either as a short term or long term commitment. Short term commitments are single day clean-ups, food drives, or any work completed in a month or less. Short term commitments are easy to do, require relatively less effort and expense, and can be squeezed into the already hectic schedule most people keep. Long term commitments, on the other hand, include working for the Peace Corps, or volunteering to head an organization for an extended period of time. These commitments are more costly, taking up significantly more time and money. They also require a greater level of skill to complete them and necessitate schedule rearrangements, so they can't be plugged in to a cramped schedule.

Volunteering, whether short or long term, helps develop skills. "Many volunteering opportunities

provide extensive training. For example, you could become an experienced crisis counselor while volunteering for a women's shelter or a knowledgeable art historian while donating your time as a museum docent"(helpguide.org). Volunteers have the opportunity to learn new skills related to the field they want to go into. By spending time learning these skills on their own, they become proficient before they are hired to a job. These skills don't even need to be applied to a job. By helping with an organization like Habitat for Humanity, a volunteer learns how to fix things around their house by building homes for others.

Beyond skill building, volunteer work builds a resumé. "Guild of Students research has shown that 93% of students believe that taking part in volunteering has increased their employability" ("UniVolunteering Boosts Job Hunt", 48). After building up skills, a volunteer can put the experience down on a resumé. This builds their credibility as a candidate by showing a commitment to both an organization and a cause in general. The competitive nature of the job market demands that students do something to differentiate themselves and this type of volunteer work does just that.

Volunteer work also strengthens communities. "In challenging and uncertain times, volunteering can also play an important role in contributing to social well-being, helping people build connections and a sense of belonging within their community" (Davis Smith, 25). The very act of volunteering reaches a hand out to those in need. A volunteer is someone actively seeking to help their neighbors.

On an individual level there are health benefits that result from volunteer work. "25% of people who volunteer more than five times a year say volunteering has helped them lose weight... 22% of 18-24 year olds say volunteering helps them cut down on alcohol... Nearly a third(30%) of 18-24 year old smokers say volunteering helps them smoke less... 9% of men and 8% of women say volunteering has improved their sex life...71% of volunteers who offer their professional skills and experience say volunteering helps combat depression... 63% of 25-34 year olds say volunteering helps them feel less

stressed" ("Making a Difference", 10). This wide array of mental health benefits can help almost anyone. Smokers smoke less, drinkers drink less, and volunteers generally feel better after they volunteer. It appears human beings are wired to help each other, working little miracles for those who do good. One study even found "a reduction in burnout is one of the benefits of short-term mission work"(Campbell et al., 627). When people volunteer they put aside their own problems and give their bodies and minds a chance to relax, time away from the stress of everyday life. This little recuperation period does wonders for them, helping them feel and function better than they did before. An interesting side-effect from the burn-out study was that improvements continued even six months after the volunteer work was done. For a small investment of time and effort volunteers receive substantial mental health payoffs.

But volunteer work is not a cure-all. "Sometimes, the circumstances in which volunteering is suggested as a solution are almost laughable,' says Debbie Usiskin, one of the founders and a director of the Association of Volunteer Management.' A doctor called me because he had a patient who had suffered a breakdown over a bereavement. He suggested getting her to volunteer in a care home for the elderly, where, because of their age, residents die'"(Das-Gupta, "Got a problem? Call a volunteer", 10). There are just some things that volunteer work can't do and it should be recommended only at the appropriate times. Sending a grieving widow to a nursing home is not the appropriate time. Volunteering cannot fix everything.

On top of that, there is a misconception that volunteers provide free labor. Like any other employees, volunteers need proper management to be well utilized. "Volunteers need to be encouraged and inducted as soon as possible, because failure to do so can be perceived as apathy or even rejection"(Das-Gupta, "Future of Volunteering", 4). If volunteers are not well used, they become as disgruntled as any other worker. However, volunteers can just stop showing up with no negative consequences to themselves. If they don't feel appreciated or that they are making a positive difference,

they will stop performing and find something else to do. The simplest fix for this problem is to have a volunteer coordinator. This person can thank them for the effort they put in or show them how their efforts have made an impact. Seeing results will keep the volunteer motivated to keep working.

Finally, some activities are mistakenly being called volunteer work, reflecting poorly on the field in general. In England in 2007, the Secretary for Children, Schools and Families had a bill that would force late adolescents to work, go to school full time, or volunteer for over 20 hours a week. If they did not, they would face a fine (Das-Gupta, "Compulsory volunteering looms", 3). However, 'volunteer or pay a fine' makes volunteer work compulsory, which is by no means volunteering. This type of misnomer taints the general concept of volunteering and eventually people dislike the idea itself. "'My friends know I voluntarily work for a charity, but I don't generally say I'm a volunteer,' says Suzanne Hewitt, 60... 'I feel that sounds rather regimental, like perhaps I should wear a uniform'" (Woollenberg, 13). By misusing the word volunteer, false associations get attached to it and the true meaning gets lost. Soon it becomes about the robotic nature of unquestioningly doing what is asked of you, rather than the selfless act of giving your time to help another.

## **Volunteering Abroad**

Study abroad and volunteer work both have many benefits and a handful overlap. The preliminary research singled out many benefits of both study abroad and volunteer work. I designed two different surveys to determine to what extent participants in both study abroad and volunteer work felt these benefits. As part of these surveys, I asked both volunteers and students who went abroad if they thought their experience helped them meet new people and build new skills. The volunteers agreed or strongly agreed 80% of the time and the study abroad students agreed or strongly agreed over 70% of the time with the statements on building skills, and 80% and 90%, respectively, agreed with the statement on meeting new people. The other questions were designed to determine what aspects were most important to participants about their respective activities. From these surveys, we can identify some ways that volunteer work can augment the study abroad experience. Volunteer work has the benefits of building new skills and helping the community it is done in. Combining volunteer work and study abroad will be enticing to many students.

Here at NIU, students opt out of traditional spring break to volunteer at Habitat for Humanity. "Students are always looking for meaningful service opportunities"(Today.niu.edu). The same types of students, when abroad, would be equally willing to do similar types of volunteer work, building new skills on top of their study abroad experience. The cultural experience would also be enhanced. Students will be working side by side with natives, people who were born and raised in the country. Working so close to others, students can't help but learn more about the culture or at least that individual. Also, just as it happened to me, when a person puts effort into a place they feel responsible for it. Students who just visit a country feel like tourists, but if they help make something in that country better, they feel more committed to it.

When engaging in this type of time abroad, students must be careful not to do work that a native would typically be paid for. Cleaning the yard of an abandoned house is perfectly acceptable if no one

else was going to do it. Cleaning someone's yard would be unacceptable, however, if it means taking away the job of local landscapers. The easiest way to avoid stealing jobs is to work through a local non-profit. These are organizations with roots in the community already, people who are currently doing good in the area. They will know what work will benefit the community that no one else has the ability, energy, or time to do.

Of course, this type of study abroad is not for everyone. Candidates would most likely self-select out of this particular program. Many students just travel for the experience of traveling, not to help solve a problem in another country. Students who would participate will be self-directed, highly motivated, empathetic to a particular country and the situation there, and must have a great deal of energy. Being self-directed and highly motivated enables the student to choose which task they should focus on at any given time. Their attention will be divided between class work, volunteer work, and the social life they want to have while abroad. Having so many foci will overwhelm a student that does not plan well, or procrastinates. This student will also need to be committed. Having empathy or a previous tie to a country gives the student extra motivation to keep up with all of their work. Students will be spread thin and it will be tempting to drop the volunteer work if they get worn out. Feeling a connection to the work will insure that the student keeps up with it. Finally, the student must be energetic. Traveling is a draining experience on its own and so is studying a foreign language. A student in this program will be doing both at once. Add on the extra layer of volunteer work and the average student will be miserable, which doesn't help anyone. Participants must complete all of their tasks, even if that means losing some sleep. Every day, the student must perform at the highest level in each area of life.

This type of program, while structured, has some flexibility. The class work will put barriers up for when the student can volunteer, leaving the student to choose how often they can volunteer. Some students will only volunteer once while they are abroad, participating in a one-time event. Other students

will want to volunteer more often, maybe once a month or maybe once a week. Contacting a local non-profit before going away will give the student a chance to plan out their volunteer schedule. The non-profit organization will also be able to put together a work load around the student that uses his or her talents to the best ability possible.

**Conclusion**

I absolutely enjoyed my time in Mexico and was inspired to create a format that other students could follow, in order to have a similar experience to what I had. As Jessica said, it is more about the stories created in this time than anything else. These stories will benefit the student when they get back, bring friends together, and even help rebuild cities. The greatest thing about studying abroad is the chance to get outside of yourself and learn about the world as greater than a series of countries separated by mountains and oceans; it is about connecting with people as humans. Study abroad brings together people who are divided by the tyranny of geography. The same concept exists in volunteering. It involves looking past the flaws, to see that we are all people and need help sometimes. By combining these two experiences, a student develops a sense of empathy for the world. The choices that students make in the future are guided by the experiences they have and hopefully the students learn something new about themselves as well as the new culture.



**Works Cited:**

- "A private matter." *The Economist* 29 Mar. 2003. Print.
- "About Us" *Kiva.org* Kiva, 30 Mar. 2011. Web. 30 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.kiva.org/about>>
- "About Us" *NewYorkCares.org* New York Cares, n.d. Web. 31 Mar. 2011
- "After they've seen Paree." *The Economist* 7 Jul 1986: 50. Print.
- "American Isolationism" *schoolhistory.org.uk* SchoolHistory.org.uk, n.d. Web. 30 Mar. 2011.  
<<http://www.schoolhistory.org.uk>>
- "Alternative spring break trips continue to grow in popularity with students looking to give back"  
*today.niu.edu* NIU Today, 7 Mar. 2011. Web. 31 Mar. 2011. <<http://today.niu.edu>>
- Arenson, Karen. "Studying abroad, the quick way." *The New York Times* 17 Nov. 2003: 17. Print.
- Bevan, Jarrad. "How to get a foot in the door." *Sunday Tasmanian(Australia)* 18 Jun. 2006: 67. Print.
- Blum, Debra. "26% of Americans Volunteer, New Study Finds." *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*  
*Philanthropy.com* 27 Jul. 2008. Web. 31 Mar. 2011.
- Campbell, Clark; Campbell, Donell; Krier, David; Kuehlthau, Ryan; Hilmes, Todd; and Stromberger, Melissa. "Reduction in burnout may be a benefit for short-term medical mission volunteers."  
*Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 7 Nov. 2009: 627-637. Study.
- Cassidy, Beth. "Youth Work - Talking Point - How can taking part in volunteering benefit young people?" *Children Now* 11 May 2010: 24. Print.
- Chmela, Holli. "Foreign Detour en Route to a College Degree." *The New York Times* 19 Oct 2005: 9. Print.
- Das-Gupta, Indira. "Compulsory volunteering looms." *Third Sector* 14 Nov. 2007: 3. Print.
- Das-Gupta, Indira. "Future of volunteering - Leading charities accept they must 'encourage and support'." *Third Sector* 30 Jan. 2008: 4. Print.
- Das-Gupta, Indira. "Got a problem? Call a volunteer." *Third Sector* 20 Jun. 2007: 10. Print.

Davis Smith, Justin. "Challenge to invest to beat the recession; THRIVE." *Birmingham Post* 1 Jan.

2009: 25. Print.

Dwyer, Mary, Peters, Courtney. "The Benefits of Study Abroad." *Transitionsabroad.com*. Transitions

Abroad.com. n.d. Web. 7 Feb. 2011.

Ellis, Susan J. "Why Volunteer?" *Energizeinc.com*, Energize Inc. n.d. Web. 7 Feb. 2011.

"First volunteering expo set." *BusinessWorld* 16 Feb. 2011: s2/6. Print.

"Focus On Youth For New Volunteering Advisory Forum." *Hermes Database* 8 Jan. 1997. Print.

"The Good Neighbor Toolkit: Why Volunteer?" *Realtor Magazine Online: Personal Benefits of*

*Volunteering*. RealtorMag. n.d. Web. 7 Feb. 2011.

Goodman, Allan. "Expand overseas program." *USA Today* 23 Aug. 2007: 11A. Print.

Harris, David. "Studying abroad can expand your understanding of the industry as well as your career

prospects. But is it worth the time, cost and effort?" *Estates Gazette* 9 Oct. 2010: 16. Print.

Hough, Marvin. "What Would the Boss Say?" *VergeMagazine.com*. Verge Magazine n.d. Web. 7 Feb.

2011.

Kochanek, Lisa. "Study abroad celebrates 75th anniversary." University of Delaware, n.d. Web. 30

Mar. 2011. <<http://www.udel.edu>>

LaFranchi, Howard. "Overseas study - an under-used option for US students." *Christian Science*

*Monitor* 15 Mar 1984. Print.

"Learning the Language" *The Washington Post* 3 Jan. 1993: E12. Print.

MacNeela, Pdraig. "The Give and Take of Volunteering: Motives, Benefits, and Personal Connections

among Irish Volunteers." *Voluntas* 2008: 19:125-139. Study. DOI 10.1007/s11266-008-9058-8

"Making a difference." *Daily Post(Liverpool)* 5 Dec. 2005: 10. Print.

McGinn, Daniel. "Internship: Sometimes It's a Reach." *Newsweek* 30 Jul. 2007: 10. Print.

Meed Ward, Marianne. "Sweet Charity; Canadians in general open up their wallets to the needy, but the

religious give the most to many causes." *The Toronto Sun* 25 Jun. 2006: 50. Print.

"Minimum Legal Drinking Ages Around the World" *potsdam.edu* Problems and Solutions, n.d. Web.

30 Mar. 2011. <<http://www2.potsdam.edu>>

Ockenden, Nick. "Volunteering Works." *Institute for Volunteering Research*. The Commission for the Future of Volunteering. Sept. 2007. Web. 7 Feb, 2011. PDF File

Oppenheimer, Andres. "Time to send more U.S. college students abroad." *The Miami Herald* 1 Mar. 2009: 9. Print

Oppenheimer, Melanie. "An idea that serves nobody." *The Australian* 14 May 2008: 51. Print

"Overseas study rejuvenates retirees." *The Nikkei Weekly* 15 Jan. 2001. Print.

Popescu, Roxana. "Get Me Out Of This Place." *Newsweek* 29 Oct 2007: 14. Print.

"Project Bayanihan" *groups.csail.mit.edu* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d. Web. 31 Mar. 2011. <<http://groups.csail.mit.edu/cag/bayanihan/>>

Springen, Karen and Nagorski, Andrew. "A Rush To Go Global: Even in the post-9/11 world, U.S. students are still eager to study abroad." *Newsweek* 11 Aug. 2008: 24. Print.

"Students Who Want to Get as Far From Home as Possible; Goucher College, Baltimore, MD." *Newsweek* 17 Aug. 2009: 0. Print.

"Study Abroad" *amherst.edu* Amherst College, n.d. Web. 31 Mar. 2011. <<https://www.amherst.edu>>

"Study Abroad Program" *Wisconsin.edu*. University of Wisconsin, Oct. 2001. Web. 30 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.wisconsin.edu>>

Teicher Khadaroo, Stacy. "Schools scrutinize and promote study abroad." *Christian Science Monitor* 27 Sept. 2007: 13. Print.

"Uni Volunteering Boosts Jobs Hunt." *Birmingham Evening Mail* 25 Feb. 2010: 48. Print.

"Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits: Helping Yourself While Helping Others" *helpguide.org* Help Guide, n.d. Web. 31 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.helpguide.org>>

"Volunteering for good." *The Press(Christchurch)* 5 Dec. 2002. Print.

Whelan, Aubrey. "Study abroad: Before you go, do homework." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 26 Dec.

2010: N05. Print.

Wilson, John, Musick, Mark. "The Effects of Volunteering on the Volunteer." *Law and Contemporary Problems*. Duke University School of Law. Autumn, 1999. Web. 7 Feb. 2011.

Woollenberg, Anne. "Charities: Volunteering: Image problem turns recruits away: Volunteering needs a facelift as young people see it as 'geeky', but what can be done to improve its image?" *The Guardian(London)* 10 Sept. 2008: 3. Print.

"Young people use volunteering as a pathway to employment." *Children Now* 19 Oct. 2010: 27. Print.

## Appendix A: Study abroad survey responses

Participants were asked to rate the accuracy of the following statements with their experiences,

1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree.'

Statement (7 Responses)	1	2	3	4	5
Study abroad gave me a useful international experience	0.00%	0.00%	14.30%	28.60%	57.10%
Study abroad helped me develop new skills	0.00%	14.30%	14.30%	42.90%	28.60%
Study abroad helped me discover new interests	0.00%	14.30%	14.30%	28.60%	42.90%
Study abroad helped me meet new people	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28.60%	71.40%
Study abroad developed my independence and maturity	0.00%	14.30%	14.30%	14.30%	57.10%
I developed new skills during my study abroad	0.00%	14.30%	14.30%	14.30%	57.10%
I met new people while I was studying abroad	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28.60%	71.40%
I learned about a new culture when I studied abroad	0.00%	0.00%	28.60%	14.30%	57.10%
I became more independent and mature when I studied abroad	0.00%	14.30%	14.30%	14.30%	57.10%
I discovered new interests when I studied abroad	0.00%	14.30%	28.60%	0.00%	57.10%

## Appendix B: Volunteer survey responses

Participants were asked to rate the accuracy of the following statements with their experiences,

1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree.'

Statement (10 Responses)	1	2	3	4	5
Volunteering helps me build new skills	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	40.00%	40.00%
Volunteering makes me more employable	10.00%	0.00%	10.00%	30.00%	50.00%
Volunteering helps me meet new people	0.00%	10.00%	10.00%	20.00%	60.00%
Volunteering helps my community	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	80.00%
Volunteering makes me feel good	0.00%	0.00%	10.00%	20.00%	70.00%
I can meet new people when I volunteer	10.00%	0.00%	20.00%	10.00%	60.00%
I can help my community	0.00%	10.00%	10.00%	0.00%	80.00%
I can build new skills when I volunteer	0.00%	10.00%	10.00%	30.00%	50.00%
I can build my resumé by volunteering	0.00%	10.00%	20.00%	0.00%	70.00%
I feel better when I volunteer	0.00%	10.00%	10.00%	20.00%	60.00%